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ABSTRACT

Intended to aid theory building in the study of influences on news content, this paper examines how five basic theoretical approaches to studying news content can be integrated into J. Herbert Altschull's assertion that mass media content reflects the ideology of those who finance the media. The paper notes that Altschull's theory accounts for the between-nation effects predicted by broad-scale sociological theories such as hegemony or the mass manipulative model, and shows that the theory also can explain the null effects which may result from studies looking for hegemonic effects. The first major section of the paper shows how the existing literature on media content can be analyzed according to five hierarchical levels of analysis related to Altschull's economic theory: (1) content accurately reflects social reality, (2) content is a function of media routines, (3) content is influenced by journalists' socialization and attitudes, (4) content results from social and institutional forces working on it, and (5) content is a function of ideological positions and a tool of the status quo. The second section outlines assumptions and theoretical statements resulting from this synthesis on the influence of funding source on content and other variables. The concluding section suggests that researchers integrate the five theoretical approaches into an economic model that explains media content as the product of a more complex set of ideological forces held by those who fund the media. (Six pages of notes are included.) (HTH)

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Building a Theory of News Content

A Synthesis of Current Approaches

Pamela J. Shoemaker
with
Elizabeth Kay Mayfield

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PAMELA J. SHOEMAKER
with
Elizabeth Kay Mayfield

Building A Theory of News Content: A Synthesis of Current Approaches

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Accepted for Publication July 1986

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THREE DECADES AFTER DAVID MANNING WHITE suggested that journalists act as gatekeepers of messages[1] and Warren Breed studied the socialization of journalists,[2] communication researchers are still investigating ways in which journalists, their media employers, newsgathering routines, and society can affect media content. The term "media sociology" is sometimes applied to studies which look at influence on media content, although some of the approaches taken (e.g., looking at journalists' socialization as professionals and their personal attitudes) may fall more appropriately within the realm of psychology or social psychology. This is an increasingly popular area of research, with some researchers who previously studied only the *effects* of content now asking why such effect-producing content exists. Yet, while these content studies have generated much data, there is little theory; few studies actually test and name a specific theory, possibly because of the rigorous space limitations imposed on many journal articles. Usually the authors present a brief description of what they expect to find and then test one or more hypotheses. Although Hage has said that a theory can be as limited as one hypothesis, normally we think of a theory as including a related set of statements and propositions, with concepts and linkages defined both theoretically and operationally.[3] Most media content studies lack such elaboration, with the result that the commonalities among the studies have been ignored and the growth of theory has been inhibited.

Our purpose is to aid theory building in the study of influences on news content. Our overall theoretical framework will be Altschull's[4] assertion that mass media content reflects the ideology of those who finance the media. Several scholors[5] have suggested other theoretical approaches to the study of media content. Gans[6] and Gitlin[7] have suggested the following categories.

(1) *Content reflects social reality with little or no distortion:* The "mirror" approach predicts that the mass media are mere channels for conveying an exact picture of social reality to the audience. The "null effects" approach also holds that media content reflects reality, but this mirroring is the result of counterbalancing forces from those who sell information to the media and those who buy it.

(2) *Content is a function of media routines:* This "routines of newsgathering" approach holds that the way in which journalists do their jobs affects the nature of news content.

(3) *Content is influenced by journalists' socialization and attitudes:* This "journalist-centered" approach looks at factors intrinsic to news media personnel affecting the news. The "consensual paradigm" approach states that journalists' media roles lead them to project a false view of reality with consensus as the norm and deviance as a minority phenomenon.

(4) *Content results from social and institutional forces working on it.* The "social/institutional influence" approach looks at factors external to the journalist, such as economic forces, culture, and the audience. The "market" approach locates influences on media content in journalists' desire to give audiences either what the audiences need or what they want.

(5) *Content is a function of ideological positions and a tool of the status quo.* "Hegemony" (or the "mass manipulative" approach) is a broad-scale theoretical approach which predicts that media content is influenced by the ideology of the powerful.

Whether these five types of theoretical approaches actually deserve the label "theory" is debatable; they certainly do not meet Hage's structured definition, and at present they are little more than ways of categorizing a body of research. DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach[8] suggest that the term "pretheory" be applied to "interesting and seemingly plausible speculations that appear to be more or less consistent with our limited amount of media research but about which we are not really sure." DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach call for media theories which predict specific relationships among independent and dependent variables in a form which can be tested empirically. Although the five approaches suggested by Gans and Gitlin are not developed into full-fledged "systematic sets of propositions," they do present sets of independent variables for study, and we can empirically test the relative influence of each independent variable on a variety of media content dependent variables.

We will show how these five basic theoretical approaches can be integrated into J. Herbert Altschull's[9] assertion that the over-riding determiner of media content is the ideology of those who finance the media. Not only does this idea account for the between-nation effects predicted by broad-scale sociological theories such as hegemony or the mass manipulative model, but we will show that it also can explain the null effects which may result from studies looking for hegemonic effects.

Altschull's theory predicts more precise ideological effects than do the hegemony and mass manipulative approaches. Altschull asserts that the mass media may not be accurately classified on a nation-by-nation system merely according to the amount of political autonomy afforded by the system. If this were true, then we would observe only between-

nation differences in media content. Altschull recognizes that there are also differences in the financing of different media or of individual vehicles in a medium within a country. A country-by-country classification system ignores this within-country variation in media financing and content, which occurs even within such archetypal social systems as the United States and the Soviet Union, and therefore introduces error into the measurement of ideology.

Another important difference between Altschull's economic model and the hegemony or mass manipulative models is the ideological emphasis. Hegemony and the mass manipulative model emphasize the ideology of the political system, with those who control the political status quo also controlling media content. Altschull's economic model places the influence on media content in the ideology of those who finance the mass media. While political ideology (at least as discussed in hegemony and the mass manipulative models) is a system-level variable, the ideology of media financiers can be measured on a system level (as in capitalistic versus socialist states) or on a variety of other levels, including the policies of media owners, the desires of advertisers, or the feedback from audience members. We can even look at these ideological influences on the career socialization and selection of journalists and on journalistic routines.

Altschull outlines four basic relationships between the ideology of media financiers and media content. Each of these may be thought of as continuous, independent variables, but each may also be combined with the others in various combinations to interact in other ways. Different countries' mass media systems will exhibit these types of relationships to varying degrees at different levels of the system and at different points in time.

> In the *official* pattern, the content of the newspaper, magazine, or broadcasting outlet is determined by rules, regulations, and decrees. Some news media may be themselves state enterprises, some may be directed through government regulations, and some may be controlled under a network of licensing arrangements. No nation is free of official controls; the variations come in the degree of autonomy that is permitted. In the *commercial* pattern, the content reflects the views of advertisers and their commercial allies, who are usually found among the owners and publishers. Even under planned economies, some commercial influences can be detected, although these are exerted only indirectly. In the *interest* pattern, the content of the medium echoes the concerns of the financing enterprise, a political party perhaps or a religious organization or any other body pursuing specific ends. In the *informal* pattern, media content mirrors the goals of relatives, friends, or acquaintances, who supply money directly or who exercise their influence to ensure that the tunes of the piper are heard.[10]

The saying "he who pays the piper calls the tune" also applies to the mass media, says Altschull, and no mass medium "exceeds the boundaries of autonomy acceptable to the paymasters."[11] While measuring the ideology of those who finance the media can help us better predict and

explain mass media content, our measurements of these ideologies are "inevitably flawed."[12] Not only are the boundaries established by an individual "paymaster" flexible, changing over time, but also the existence of several competing paymasters in a system can make measuring their individual ideological contributions a researcher's nightmare. To the extent that our measurements are imprecise, with more error variance within our ideology measurement categories than between them, our studies are doomed to yield null results.

Therefore, it is important for mass communication researchers to understand the relationships and interactions among influences on mass media content, and for more than three decades researchers have attempted to do just that. The research agenda has been rich and diverse, with hundreds of researchers looking at many different types of content and at a myriad of factors that might affect that content. Their methods and results have differed, as have their levels and units of analysis. Yet, as different as these studies have been, there are commonalities which can be explained. The rich diversity of research on media content can be integrated into a common theoretical framework in an attempt to build theory in this important area.

The remaining discussion will be organized into two major sections and a conclusion. The first major section will show how the existing literature may be analyzed according to five hierarchical levels of analysis which are related to each other and to Altschull's economic theory. The second section will outline assumptions and theoretical statements which are the outcome of this theoretical synthesis. Before proceeding to the literature, however, it is important to define the key concepts which will be used: First, we use the term *content* to refer to the complete range of quantitative and qualitative attributes of both verbal and visual communication of news. We will review studies that look at dependent variables such as the amount of news covered about an event as well as the type of news or presentation of the stories. The term *newsworthiness* is used to denote an important criterion which journalists use to judge whether a story should be covered. Newswriting and editing textbooks usually offer a "laundry list" of indicators of newsworthiness, including: conflict or controversy; prominence; novelty, oddity or the unusual; sensationalism; importance, impact, or consequences; interest; timeliness; and proximity.[13]

By the term *reality*, we refer to that which a society knows about itself, Fishman's definition of social reality.[14] As Fishman points out, society has many sources of information about itself, including personnel files, interoffice memos, business inventories, book reviews, opinion polls, car repair manuals, and media reports. When we speak of *distortion* in this monograph we refer to the extent to which the view of the world presented by the mass media differs from that presented by other sources. In a sense, this is a measure of inter-coder reliability between sources of information, with no way of assessing which coder is correct. The complexity of social reality prevents an objective assessment by any one source.[15]

The term *ideology*, which plays an important role in Altschull's theory but which he does not define, refers to the body of doctrines or beliefs that guides a particular individual, class, or culture. Ideologies can be

broad and generalized, such as favoring capitalism, or object-specific, such as supporting a particular candidate or piece of legislation. An assumption in Altschull's work is that ideology is motivational, that individuals' actions follow both their own ideological positions and those from their class and culture.

A SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE

There is a large body of research which investigates the ways in which mass media content more or less accurately portrays the world. As early as 1922, Lippmann[16] wrote that the media present a "pseudoenvironment" to which people react, and our first grouping of studies looks at the extent to which media content deviates from other versions of social reality. Lippmann's work suggests that the media are never capable of fully and completely describing the world, that the media account of an event or issue can never be equivalent to in-person experiences with events or issues, and that other versions of social reality may present different views. The last four groups of studies in this section attempt to explain the nonequivalence of the versions of social reality presented by the media, by other sources of information, and by personal experience. These look at a wide variety of influences on media content and can be grouped into four theoretical approaches:[17] routines of newsgathering, journalists' orientations and attitudes, social and institutional influences, and ideological influences.

As we look at the studies from these five areas, we will point out the relationship of the five approaches to one another and to Altschull's economic theory of content.[18] The five approaches are not presented as mutually exclusive categories, although they do vary in terms of levels of analysis. The decision to report a study's findings in one approach rather than another reflects the best fit such a *post hoc* theoretical analysis can give it. Some studies tested hypotheses which would fit in two or more categories. For example, Powell and Friedkin[19] showed that both external political forces and internal media organizational factors can shape the type of programs that are shown on public television. Likewise, Turow's[20] analysis of mass media industry power roles includes both intra- and extra-media influences on content.

Content as a Reflection of Reality

Some people, notably journalists,[21] believe that the mass media are mere channels for the transmission of information about reality to the audience. "We don't make the news; we report it," said Richard Salant, then president of CBS News. "Our reporters do not cover stories from their point of view. They are presenting them from nobody's point of view."[22] Television newscaster Walter Cronkite's ending for his news program, "And that's the way it is," also exemplifies this perspective. The role of the media is seen as that of a neutral gatherer and transmitter of information, not unlike that of a sponge that daily soaks up information about the world and then releases it on a predetermined schedule. In the extreme version of this approach, the journalist is a disinterested, totally independent, all-seeing, and ever-present observer

and recorder who never makes a mistake. The result is supposedly that media content provides an accurate and representative portrait of the world.

Young[23] suggests another theoretical approach which has much the same effect, in that mass media content provides a fair representation of reality with minimal or no distortion, but the reason for such accuracy is very different. In Young's view, it is not that journalists are neutral and noble observers and recorders of reality, but that they are pushed and shoved by counterbalancing forces into providing a fairly accurate view of the world. The mass media are simultaneous purchasers of the views of those who have power (news) and the salesmen of those views to the working class. The market system of buying and selling news exerts its own controls on distortions — a form of economic determinism.

This null effects model puts the ultimate power for social control not in the hands of the mass media, but rather in the hands of the audience, which actively tries to make sense of its world by using the mass media and interpreting media messages in light of its own frame of reference. If an audience member has a fully developed attitude toward an issue, Young says, then the effect of the mass media will be to reinforce that attitude; the audience interprets the message in line with its predispositions, an assumption reminiscent of Lazarsfeld's[24] limited effects model. In both the null effects and limited effects models, the mass media are viewed as having little or no effect on social change. Control lies within the audience members — both the controlling and working classes — who are active, even defensive, processors of information. While the economic deterministic process which the null effects model describes would be difficult to test, there are a number of studies which test whether mass media content is distorted. These studies typically are event-oriented, with media content compared to some external measure of reality to determine whether media content reflects reality accurately or with distortion. One of the earliest tests of media distortion was by Lang and Lang,[25] comparing television coverage of the 1951 MacArthur Day parade in Chicago with the impressions of participant observers. People who saw the parade on television thought it was a more exciting event than did those who saw it in person.

Recent research comparing mass media content with other sources of information about social reality looks at either the accuracy or the representativeness of mass media content, and there seems to be more evidence in favor of the media's general accuracy than for their representativeness. Borman[26] found that few of the facts published about science topics were actually inaccurate, but that there were many omissions of relevant information. The number of omissions was directly related to article length, indicating that structural space constraints might be to blame. Scanlon, Liuiko, and Morton[27] concluded that the general impression the media gave about crisis events was accurate, but that there were errors in reporting factual details, such as names, ages, and statistics, and that all of these errors were unattributed. This may mean that journalists are relying on their inaccurate memories or interpretations to fill out a story when sources are not available. The media are apparently less successful at representing classes of people and events in content in the same proportions that the classes apparently oc-

cur in the real world. Crimes against people[28] and violent crimes[29] are more likely to get media coverage than crimes against property or nonviolent crimes, and deaths due to violence are more likely to be reported than deaths due to disease.[30] A comparison of the number of network television news stories to geographic region population[31] showed that the Midwest is undercovered while other regions are overcovered in network broadcasts.

Some studies show that media content sometimes does represent events and people in proportion to their true occurrence. Renfro[32] compared proportions of categories of letters to the editor received by newspapers with those published. She found that most letters to the editor are published, regardless of topic, although there is some tendency to publish more letters on education, law and order, and fewer on the economy, the media, and religion. Minority topics and letters from special interest groups are given access in proportion to the number of letters received. Perry[33] compared the magnitude of a nation's industrial dispute problem with the amount of coverage of strikes and lockouts in *Time* and *Newsweek*. Coverage is proportionate to the true magnitude of the problem up to a point and then decreases. Weaver and Wilhoit[34] found that senatorial activity is a better predictor of AP coverage than power.

Journalists do not make up the news, says Gans; they begin with an empirically verifiable version of reality.[35] Yet, there are observable instances where the version of an event or the portrayal of an issue presented by the news media differs from that offered by other sources. Studies which test whether news and public affairs content is accurate and representative suggest that, while the news media are usually accurate, they often do not publicize classes of people and events in proportion to their occurrence as measured by other sources. Inaccuracy occurs when there are constraints on the journalist, whether by limiting the space he has available for painting his view of the world[36] or by making dependable information difficult or impossible to acquire before the story must be filed.[37]

The representativeness of news content is undoubtedly affected by journalists' conceptions of which events and people are most newsworthy. Perhaps strikes and lockouts[38] are covered in proportion to their true existence only as long as they remain newsworthy; when strikes become common, then they are less likely to be covered. Violent crimes or deaths and crimes against people are probably more newsworthy than crimes against property or deaths due to most diseases,[39] thus ensuring their coverage. The representative publication of letters to the editor[40] probably is a function of the fact that a limited number of letters are available for selection. The newsworthiness criterion may be less important when publishers have limited opportunities for demonstrating their interest in and attention to reader feedback. Explanations for the media's not mirroring reality at times can be found in journalistic routines, journalists' socialization, and influences from advertisers and audiences — all of which are related to the ideologies of those who finance the news media.

Content as a Function of Media Routines

Several researchers have studied newsgathering habits, including Gitlin,[41] Gans,[42] Tuchman,[43], Fishman,[44] White,[45] and Goldenberg.[46] Altheide[47] sums up this approach by saying that "the organizational, pracitical, and other mundane features of newswork promote a way of looking at events which fundamentally distorts them." Altheide and Snow[48] call the process through which the media present and transmit information "media logic." A number of studies look at how news organization habits and routines affect the kinds of stories that are written and published or broadcast. Examples of media routines include:

- Deadlines, which make the journalist stop seeking information in order to file the story.
- Story quotas, because a fixed minimum amount of news stories are needed each day to accompany advertisements.
- Availability of sources, which affects who gets media access. Institutional sources are more readily available to the journalist than individuals and special interest groups, making it difficult for noninstitutional sources to get their ideas transmitted.
- The event-orientation of most media stories, particularly in television, means that issues are covered less often than events, with their better visual opportunities.
- The inverted-pyramid style of writing news stories, which conveys the journalists' assessment of what is important to the reader.
- The selection, shaping, and timing of stories—or gatekeeping—which influences what gets covered, how much, and when.

Some routines help differentiate television news content from newspaper content. Tunstall[49] says television emphasizes visuals more than newspapers and prefers film with its own reporter interviewing someone. In addition, television prefers hard news stories and uses shorter stories than newspapers do.

The anticipated script for covering a news story can affect content, according to Bennett, Gressett, and Haltom.[50] Their case study of how television journalists covered a man who set himself on fire showed that journalists were confused about how to handle the story when it deviated from the expected script. Fico[51] found that the number and type of sources reporters use is limited by constraints such as deadlines and geographic location. The more constraints the reporter operates under, the more narrow the range of sources he relies on. Lacy and Mutusik[52] also found that suburban newspaper staffs who do not have access to wire services depend heavily on organizations and beats to provide story ideas. Hackett[53] showed that government spokespersons, ranking politicians, and leaders of organized groups have better access to television news than other people do.

Journalists' habitual reliance on story sources like press releases has a clear impact on their stories. Sachsman[54] found that many reporters and editors rely on press releases for information about the environment because the releases provide an easy source of information. Martin and Singletary[55] found that nearly 20 percent of all press releases are used

verbatim, and that nondaily newspapers are more likely to use a large number of press releases and to use them verbatim than dailies. Negative news releases are more likely than positive releases to be used verbatim. Another routine source of information for the mass media is wire service copy. Whitney and Becker[56] found that newspaper editors select stories in various categories for publication in the same proportion that the stories appear on the wires. Todd,[57] however, found that the New York Times wire service advisories do not set the agenda for its subscribers. There is no difference in the play given to stories by subscribers and nonsubscribers. Martindale[58] found no evidence that newspaper reporters followed the lead of wire correspondents.

Routines in writing and categorizing stories can also affect content. Lemert, *et al.*,[59] found that mobilizing information is least likely to be in a story if that story is negative or controversial, nonlocal, in a main news section, or on the editorial page. The researchers speculated that mobilizing information is routinely kept out of these stories because journalists might be accused of partisanship. Likewise, Fowler and Smith[60] found that journalists use different writing styles for immediate reward stories (e.g., crime, disaster, sports, social events) than they do for delayed reward stories (e.g., public affairs, economics, and social problems). Webb and Salancik[61] showed that variables inherent in the interviewing process between journalists and sources (such as question wording and characteristics of the interviewer) can influence the source's responses. Technological constraints can also affect media content. Randall[62] found that newspapers which use full electronic editing have fewer errors in spelling, punctuation, sentence construction, hyphenation, and typography. Shipley and Gentry[63] found that VDT editing is more accurate than hard copy editing.

Many of the research projects on the effects of journalistic routines on media content show that these routines have an impact. As Hall, Chritcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts[64] indicate, "'News' is the end-product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selecting of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories." What these studies do not show, however, is evidence that this impact results in distorted pictures of social reality, that is, in a different view of the world than is portrayed by other sources. If the wire services present stories to a newspaper which give an accurate and representative view of that day's events, then an observed agenda-setting effect from the wires to the newspaper[65] will result in no distortions. Journalists' tendency to use longer sentences for delayed reward stories than for immediate reward stories[66] may result in a clearer presentation of complex and abstract issues than would a more consistent, simpler style. There is limited evidence in the literature to suggest that such routines of newsgathering do result in distortion of reality. The available studies concentrate on showing that various influences do exist, but they do not demonstrate that these influences result in distortion. Influences on content may work toward presenting a view of social reality that is similar or dissimilar to other assessments.

Some routines of newsgathering will differ between countries' media systems, but there will also be differences in routines between media within one country. These differences can be traced partially to in-

fluences from the ideologies of those who finance the media (to the extent that media financiers have beliefs that affect how content is gathered, e.g., a belief that some things are more newsworthy than others or that some visual presentations are more desirable than others) and partially to individual differences between journalists and to the structural and technological constraints under which different media operate. We predict that ideological influences are more likely to produce distortions in content than the structural and technological constraints. Individual differences between journalists may result in distortions if those differences are the result of ideological forces acting on the journalists' socialization.

Content as Influenced by Journalists' Socialization and Attitudes

The journalist-centered approach to studying influences on mass media content looks at how forces intrinsic to the journalists may affect the stories he writes. Paletz and Entman[67] say that news content is determined by the "internal logic of media organizations and personnel." These intrinsic forces include professional socialization, such as the journalists' sense of what is newsworthy or objective, as well as journalists' attitudes and orientations.

Professionalism. Some studies, such as Breed's,[68] consider how a journalist is socialized to take on the role of a media professional. Journalists learn from observation and experience what is newsworthy and how to avoid libel suits and criticism from peers by using what Tuchman[69] calls the strategic rituals of objectivity. The journalist's socialization as a media professional gives him what Sigal[70] calls "a context of shared values" with other journalists. All journalists are not equally trained, however, Storad[71] points out that the typical newspaper science writer is older, better educated, and more experienced than the general assignment reporter.

Several studies have investigated how journalists' professional conceptions of what is newsworthy can affect their selection of stories. Dimmick[72] showed that journalists' perception of news is more complex than that of nonjournalists. Weaver and Wilhoit[73] investigated what made senators newsworthy for coverage in newsmagazines, but there was no evidence that the senator's characteristics (seniority, prestige of committee assignments, population of state, and so on) affect the amount of coverage senators are given. Newsworthiness also failed to predict content variables in a study by Ostroff and Sandell.[74] Television news directors' and producers' assessments of the importance of various types of campaign events were unrelated to the amount of coverage actually devoted to the campaign events.

Proximity to the news event has been the independent variable in several studies. Manheim[75] found that twice as much newspaper coverage is devoted to congressional campaigns in rural areas than in urban areas; rural editors say the campaign is more newsworthy than urban editors do regardless of the information's timeliness. Rosenthal[76] found that proximity is an important variable in determining the kind of story written about an event. Editors close to a crisis event select "preparedness" stories, whereas those farther away write analytical

stories about solving the problem. Luttbeg,[77] however, found no support for the idea that proximity affects whether an event is covered; therefore, while proximity affects the type or amount of coverage of an event, it may have little impact on whether the event is covered. Proximity has been used as a surrogate measurement of newsworthiness, the assumption being that the closer an event is to a medium's base of operation, the more likely the event is to be covered or the more coverage the event will receive. To the extent that other criteria influence the newsworthiness decision, proximity may not serve as a good measure of newsworthiness, an idea supported by Chang, Shoemaker, and Brendlinger.[78] They showed that the concept "deviance" is an important discriminator between covered and non-covered events, even when proximity is taken into account.

Cohen and Young[79] use the term "market theory" to refer to the effects of professionalism on media content. The social responsibility version of this market approach sees the role of professional journalists as public educators. (The libertarian version of the market approach will be discussed in the social/institutional influence section of this monograph.) The market approach holds that responsible journalists select those events for publication which are in the public interest and then present them realistically. Thus this approach is similar to the mirror approach in that media content is hypothesized to mirror at least a portion of reality.

Personal Attitudes and Orientations. Other studies look at how journalists' personalities, personal opinions, and lifestyles may affect the stories they write. Paletz and Entman[80] say that journalists hold traditional American values: individualism, free enterprise, competitiveness, and materialism. Although they did not tie their findings directly to differences in media content, Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman[81] found that some journalists consider themselves "neutrals," seeing their jobs as mere channels of transmission, and that others see themselves as "participants," believing that journalists need to sift through information in order to find and develop the story. Culbertson[82] showed that beliefs about contemporary newspaper journalism fall into three clusters — traditional, interpretive, and activist. More support for the idea that journalists' biases affect their coverage of people and events come from a study by Rainville and McCormick,[83] in which the authors found that white and black football players were described differently by game announcers. While white and black players were matched on a number of characteristics to control for other variables which would explain the different coverage, there was no direct measure of announcers' racial attitudes. Racial attitudes were assumed to be the casual variable. Support for feminism was inferred by Farley[84] in her story of how women's magazines covered the Equal Rights Amendment. Farley found that women publishers gave more favorable coverage to ERA than men. There was no direct measure of editors' policies in a study by Windhauser, Norton, and Rhodes.[85] The researchers discovered content differences under the three editors, and attributed the differences to differences in editorial policies. In addition, Martindale[86] suggests that either the increased number of minority reporters or the increased participation of blacks in politics could have accounted for an increase in

coverage of blacks from the 1950s to the 1960s.

These kinds of indirect measures of journalists' or publishers' attitudes are common in studies, but they have obvious limitations. It is difficult to accept such indirect measures of the independent variable as adequate evidence of attitudes causing behaviors. In two of the few studies that directly measure writers' attitudes, one study supports the idea that attitudes are related to content, while the other refutes that. Drew[87] found that journalism students' attitudes toward a source are not related to how favorable their stories are about the source, but Starck and Soloski[88] found that journalism students who see themselves as "neutrals" write the least fair and comprehensive stories. The most objective and accurate stories are written by students who see themselves as "low participants," i.e. somewhere close to the middle of a bipolar continuum from high participant to high neutral. In addition, Stone and Mazza[89] found a relationship between how long a publisher has lived in a community and both his conceptualization of himself as a community leader and how much local news he publishes. Those who see themselves as community leaders are also less likely to publish editorials. Peterson, Albaum, Kozmetsky, and Cunningham[90] directly measured newspaper editors' attitudes toward capitalism in an effort to explain an alleged anti-business sentiment of the press. Contrary to their hypotheses, however, they found that newspaper editors are more favorably disposed toward capitalism than is the general public.

Perhaps the difference in these studies' results lies in whether the attitude being studied is object-specific, such as attitudes toward a source, or a general orientation toward one's role as a journalist (participant versus neutral or community leader). Considering only those studies in which the attitude variable is measured directly rather than being inferred, there is evidence that such general orientations have more influence on media content than attitudes toward specific issues, people, or events. Dreier[91] would presumably support such a conclusion, since he points out how differing social, political, and corporate ties of newspaper directors result in varied ideologies.

Corporate Endorsements and Policies. A medium's endorsement of a political candidate provides a direct measure of either the publisher's political attitude or the collective attitude of an editorial board. Tunstall[92] says that much news organization policy is traditional and relatively fixed. While most policies are not written down, journalists can learn them by experience and by observing what kinds of stories are used by the organization.

Several studies have looked at whether media favor in news articles the candidate they endorse in their editorials, but there is little or no evidence to support that hypothesis. Sinclair[93] found that a newspaper's political endorsement has no effect on the degree of "horserace" or "substance" coverage; most coverage dealt with substantive issues rather than the contest. Wilhoit and Auh[94] found that newpapers which endorse a candidate treat the candidates in the endorsed race more alike than do newspapers which do not endorse candidates. Donohew[95] found a direct, positive relationship between publishers' attitudes toward an issue and their newspapers' treatment of the issue. Other studies have used indirect measures of corporate or publisher policies, with mixed

results. While Fedler, Smith, and Maeske[96] found that the amount of agreement between a news magazine's policies and a source's views is not related to how much coverage that source gets, Mann[97] found that size estimates of political demonstration crowds vary according to whether the newspaper's policies are "hawk" or "dove." It is difficult to compare these studies, however, since one uses the amount of coverage as the dependent measure, while the other uses essentially the type of source selected.

Attitudes Toward Consensus and Deviance. Another twist on the idea that journalists' personalities and orientations affect media content comes from the consensual paradigm approach. Reality, as Young[98] describes the theory, is pluralistic and conflictual; therefore the image of consensus is a myth conveyed by the mass media to the public. This consensual myth arises out of the professional standards of the journalist and by his position in the process of news production. The journalist is located midway between management and workers and is in a job which rewards merit and encourages individualism. The result is that journalists tend to have a view of the world which "is centrist, identifying with universal interest rather than that of workers or management, individualistic, meritocratic, and overemphasizes the voluntarism of work."[99] The consensual paradigm approach puts the power for social control in the nature of the message: "At heart the theory states that media operatives use a particular paradigm of reality in order to understand events in the real world. This paradigm, or 'inferential structure,' is consensual in its basis. That is, it bifurcates the world into a majority of normal people who are possessed of free will and a deviant minority who are determined by forces beyond their control."[100] Shoemaker[101] found evidence to support a hypothesis that journalists' attitudes toward political group deviance affect newspaper coverage of the groups. The more deviant journalists rated a group, the less legitimately it was portrayed in the newspaper.

Summary. Of those studies which directly measure the influence of variables intrinsic to journalists, very few demonstrate an effect of that variable on content. There is some evidence that a journalist's general orientations about his role as a professional do influence his stories, but there is little direct evidence that a journalist's attitudes about a specific person, object, or issue influence content. While some indirect evidence does point to a relationship between attitudes and content, the validity of the measures used is in question. All we can say with a modicum of assurance is that journalists' career socialization may influence mass media content. The Starck and Soloski[102] study suggests that this influence may in fact result in content which presents a distorted view of social reality when compared to a nonmedia standard: Journalists who had been socialized as "neutrals" produced the least fair and comprehensive stories, while those who had a moderate amount of a "participant" orientation produced the most fair, accurate, objective, and comprehensive stories.

We must ask why some journalists would be socialized in one way and some another. We could explain such differences as a result of differing ideologies of those who fund the media. Johnstone, Slawski, and Bowman[103] found that "neutrals" and "participants" tended to have dif-

ferent backgrounds and to work for different sorts of newspapers. The "participants" tended to have graduated from a "better" school; to have more years of formal schooling; to work for a larger, more prestigious media organization; and to socialize more with journalists than with non-journalists. Such experiences yield different orientations toward journalism, which could be explained as the result of differing ideologies of those who finance the media the people work for. The economic status of a large newspaper will undoubtedly be different than that of a small newspaper, almost certainly in the number of people employed, but also perhaps in the responsibilities assigned to each journalist, in the amount of autonomy allocated, and in the day-to-day relationship between the publisher and his staff. In addition, "better" schools may be perceived as better because they are more successful in placing their graduates in prestigious (and probably large) media organizations. The schools at least partially tailor their curricula to this end. In addition, when journalists socialize a lot with each other, they reinforce their prevailing professional roles.

We believe that the agents which contribute to a journalist's socialization — his famly, his school, his peers, and the media — each exert their own ideological influences on the journalist. The ideology of those who finance his education, the ideology of the school (which is influenced by the ideology of potential employers of graduates), the ideology of those who work in the media organization, and the ideology of those who financially support his particular medium all interact to produce a certain orientation toward the job. We do not predict that this orientation will be uniform within a given country, but rather that journalists' orientations toward their jobs will differ based on these four ideological variables.

Content as Resulting from Social and Institutional Forces

As Gans[104] outlines it, to understand the production of the news, one must first understand the power relationships involved between various institutions or social forces outside of the news organizations. The news is shaped by technological, economic, and cultural forces, as well as by the audience, advertisers, and news sources. News comes to journalists primarily from institutional sources who exert pressures of various kinds on journalists and the news process. In this theoretical approach, the forces that shape the news are said to be extrinsic to the journalist — the opposite of the journalist-centered approach. Economic forces are especially important, and a wide variety of studies have looked at various economic influences, such as ownership or competition variables. Information is a "salable good," and the commercialization of information is common practice.[105] Other influences include the medium's function in its community, audience size and circulation, community and market size, the existence of guidelines from special interest groups, advertising, language, and culture. While Young[106] sees these forces resulting in a relatively accurate view of the world (see his null effects theory, discussed previously), several others show how such forces can result in the shaping of social reality.

Ownership of the Mass Media. There have been many studies of influences on media content due to chain ownership, cross-ownership, and independent ownership. Chain and group ownership does influence media content in some instances, but not in others. Chain newspapers are more likely than non-chain newspapers to endorse candidates, and the chain endorsements tend to be homogeneous.[107] Chain-owned newspapers also publish fewer argumentative editorials, fewer editorials on local matters, and fewer editorials on controversial topics than independent papers, but there is no relationship between ownership and the amount of mobilizing information published.[108] More evidence against influence due to chain ownership comes from a study by Wagenberg and Soderlund,[109] who found that chain ownership does not result in any collusion by editorialists within the chain to stress any particular issue or promote any particular political party.

Group ownership of television stations has also been studied, with some conflicting results. Litman[110] found that television stations owned by a network are less likely to preempt controversial programs, and that they show fewer major league sports programs than independent stations. Group-owned television stations also broadcast more news than nongroup stations.[111] Austin,[112] however, found no difference between independent and network-owned stations in the categories of programs they broadcast in prime time. Cross-ownership of television stations and newspapers may influence content, with studies showing that cross-owned media sometimes do a better job of transmitting public affairs and nonentertainment information than noncross-owned media.[113] Network ownership of newspapers, however, apparently does not influence the newspapers' coverage of the networks' Sunday interview shows.[114] Stempel[115] showed that media news content is less comprehensive in a town where the media are all owned by one company than in towns with multiple media owners. Meyer and Wearden[116] found no difference in financial orientation between journalists at publicly and privately owned newspapers, but they did not look at content differences.

Competition Among Media. The presence or absence of competition has been shown to affect mass media content in several studies. Long[117] showed that the program diversity among television networks declined after the Dumont Network went out of business, leaving only three networks. Rothenbuhler and Dimmick[118] got similar results in their study of concentration and diversity within the record industry: As the number of competing firms decreases, diversity declines. Monopoly ownership of newspapers increases duplication in content between morning and evening newspapers in some instances, but not in others.[119] Weaver and Mullins'[120] study of leading and trailing newspapers in competitive markets revealed that there was no difference in the amount of space devoted to categories except for news of the home. Leading newspapers were, however, more likely to use less vivid graphic devices than the trailing newspapers.

Circulation, Profit, and Community Factors. Some researchers have investigated whether circulation and market size, relative profitability, and various community measures would affect mass media content. Stone and Morrison[121] showed that lower circulation community

newspapers are more likely than high circulation papers to stress local copy and legal advertising, because these newspapers' goal is to be the community's voice. In a study by Hynds,[123] larger circulation newspapers are found to be more likely to run exposes, stories on how corporations yield power, and stories on an individual company's performance. Circulation size is not related, however, to any changes in business coverage, such as increasing the number of pictures used or giving business news more space. Prisuta[125] found no relationship between various economic prosperity variables and the amount of news and public affairs information broadcast, but Csaplar[124] showed that cost is a factor in whether television stations broadcast a local or a local/syndication "hybrid" show. Becker, Ream, and Russial[125] found no support for a hypothesis that community size and growth, market growth, and retail sales influence newspaper performance, but Drechsel, Netteburg, and Aborisade[126] did find that there is less local court reporting in smaller communities. Brown[127] found that a national index of business stability is related to the frequency of newsmagazine items about population growth and family planning, presumably because people focus on birth control when their personal financial situations become unstable. The newsmagazines reflect this concern on the part of their audiences.

Advertisers, Audiences, and Special Interest Groups. While there is substantial evidence to show that audiences do influence media content, and there is a suggestion that advertisers also affect content, the evidence in favor of special interest group influence is mixed. Kariel and Rosenvall[128] showed that the audience's language affects the quantity of news published about different countries; although newspapers have access to the same news sources, they apparently select news according to their reader's affinities. Magazines also select content according to their target audiences, according to a study by Cantor and Jones.[129]

The language used in media content has also been a dependent variable in several projects. Namenwirth and Bibbie[130] found that mass audience newspapers use a restricted code (predictable), while prestige audience newspapers use an elaborated (complex) speech code. In a similar study, Bell[131] found that radio newscasters change their style of speech according to how prestigious they perceive their audience to be. Cherry[132] says that the definition of news can be determined by who journalists believe their significant reference group to be. Schiller[133] adds that the tendency for news distribution to be made on an "ability-to-pay basis" means that those who can pay will become the arbiters of what types of information are produced and made available.

Tunstall[134] suggests that there are actually four audiences that a journalist may consider: (a) other journalists, (b) his sources, (c) the highly interested public, and (d) the total audience. No news organization tries only to give the total audience what it wants. Media have many different goals, Tunstall says, not just the goal of increasing revenue. Tankard and Peirce[135] have shown that advertisers exert influence over magazine content; the amount of alcohol advertising in magazines is related to how favorable the magazine's editorial content is toward alcoholic beverages. Janus[136] has pointed out a more direct way in which advertisers may influence media content: Advertisers use the new unregulated communication technologies as a format for their

"advertiser-created programs." Janus says that more and more videocassettes, discs, and cable channels are being filled with content produced by advertisers. Powell and Friedkin[137] have shown that, even when advertisers are not a factor, as in U.S. public television, funding sources still affect the parameters of program content.

The influence of special interest groups is less well documented, with Tankard, Middleton, and Rimmer[138] failing to find any influence of American Bar Association guidelines on media content, while Albritton and Manheim[139] showed that Rhodesia's public relations campaign did have a positive impact on the portrayal of Rhodesia in the U.S. press. Stocking[140] suggests that public relations activities may have no effect on media visibility independent of the publicized organization's inherent newsworthiness. Stempel and Culbertson[141] speculate that a source's influence might be indexed by his prominence and dominance. Labunski and Pavlik[142] suggest that the threat of legal action by story subjects also affects content. In their study, two-thirds of both print and broadcast investigative journalists agreed that some important stories were not being covered because their organizations feared libel suits.

Cultural and National Economic Factors. Several system-level variables may also influence mass media content, according to a number of studies. Cultural differences between rural and urban editors' work environment account for differences in the newspapers' women's sections, according to Gross and Merritt.[143] Rural editors are less likely than urban editors to publish articles about the changing role of women. Cline's[144] study of how elite U.S. newspapers cover Latin America shows wide variability in content, indicating that there is no central, cultural gatekeeper controlling content. Gerbner and Marvanyi[145] found an inverse relationship between commercial sponsorship of media and foreign news coverage. The publicly owned or institutionally managed press assigns higher priority to the outside world than the commercial press does. Sparkes[146] also found that economic variables are related to content in his study comparing U.S. and Canadian media coverage of each other. The U.S. gets more coverage in Canadian media than Canada does in the U.S. media, and this difference is related directly to differences in the percentages of foreign trade accounted for by the other country and to GNP projections. There was no support, however, for a hypothesis by Wilhoit and Weaver[147] that a country's level of development is related to the number of wire services stories about those countries.

Summary. Studies which investigate influences due to various social and institutional variables within a social system do yield statistically significant results. There is considerable evidence to suggest that factors extrinsic to the journalist are related to mass media content. Those factors include medium ownership and competition, market variables, and the audience. In some of those studies, however, causal direction is in question. Do higher circulation newspapers run more exposes because of their high level of circulation, or does the circulation result from the selection of content? A functional theorist would presumably say that the newspaper's desire for more circulation causes it to select content that the audience prefers, and there is evidence for this idea within some studies.[148] Several studies show that the mass media try to give the au-

dience what it wants — not that the media try to mold the audience's perception of the world. This idea is echoed in the libertarian version of market theory.[149] It is the market which determines media content; journalists merely give the public what it wants. If this results in a distortion of reality, then the blame lies in those factors that make the mass media dependent on pleasing their audiences.

When the mass media's relationship to its financiers is primarily "commercial," then we would expect the audience to exert significant influence over content through its economic support of various media and advertisers; mass media content would reflect the owners' need to give the audience what it wants. The audience would also exert influence in the "interest" type of relationship; however, that influence would not be a function of the market economy, but rather of people who hold special interests in common joining to produce certain types of content: The audience finances its own content. If the media's relationship to their financiers is primarily "official" or "informal," then we would expect less influence from the audience on content.

All four of these relationships can exist within a given country. In the United States, for example, many mass media are in a "commercial" relationship to their financiers, relying on advertising income and audience revenues for their support, with the audience and advertisers influencing media owners' selection of content.[150] Yet many of these same media — particularly the broadcast media — also abide by government regulations and judicial opinions in the preparation of content, and there are some mass communication messages which are wholly produced and controlled by the government. Other media in the United States serve special "interests," such as trade and professional association publications; their content is determined by and for the audience. The "informal" type of media-financier relationship is less common in the United States today, with corporate and group ownership of the media becoming more and more common, but there are still some media vehicles which are controlled by families and close associates who transmit content in line with their own goals and ideals.

Studies investigating influences of ownership patterns on mass media content are easily integrated into our economic theory of media content, although the influence of variables such as chain or group ownership and cross-ownership is not equally observed on all dependent variables. Chain and group ownership did affect these content variables: likelihood to endorse candidates and homogeneity of endorsements;[151] the number of argumentative, local-topic, and controversial-topic editorials published;[152] likelihood to preempt controversial programs and number of major league sports shows broadcast;[153] and the amount of news broadcast.[154] Chain and group ownership failed to affect these content variables: the amount of mobilizing information published;[155] editorial emphasis on issues or promotion of particular political parties;[156] and the categories of programs broadcast in prime time. Cross-ownership affected how well public affairs and nonentertainment information is covered,[157] but it did not affect newspapers' coverage of their network-owners' Sunday interview shows.[158]

Differences in the dependent variables and methods used in these studies make the results difficult to compare. We infer from these

results that the type of content variables being studied will affect whether a relationship is observed between content and ownership patterns. Although ownership patterns do influence some content variables, we would naturally expect that within a newspaper chain or broadcast group there are bound to be individual differences in the ways in which the journalists at those newspapers and television station do their jobs. We suggest that these differences will exist only in areas where the owner's ideology is ambiguous or nonexistent. We cannot, however, make a blanket statement about the kinds of content which will be of the most concern to all media owners, since their ideologies will differ in direction, strength, and even whether they exist in a particular instance. Not all publishers are equally interested in religion or politics, for example, and therefore the influence of a religious or political ideology will vary among publishers. The same is true of owner intervention into the day-to-day routines of medium; some media owners will exert direct influence over variables such as the categories of content to be published, and others will not. The difference lies in the existence and strength of the owner's management ideology.

To restate Altschull's[159] theory, to understand the influences on a medium's content, you must have specific knowledge about its financiers' ideologies. In the United States, this is more complicated than just knowing the ideologies of the medium's owner, however, since most of the general media's financing comes from advertisers and audiences. Therefore, for the typical American commercial medium, ideological influences will be exerted by, at a minimum, advertisers, audiences, and owners. Without a direct measure of the ideology in specific areas of each of these financiers, we cannot adequately predict media content.

Content as Influenced by Ideology

Some theorists view mass media content as being manipulated (however subtly) by the status quo as one way of winning the consent of the population. Galbraith[160] points out the importance which governmental agencies place on controlling information. Because "unauthorized" leaks are thought to be very damaging, the ability to handle information is an important bureaucratic discipline. Gramsci[161] says that the powerful dominate the powerless through the hegemonic insertion of an ideological framework into the subordinate classes' common sense. The dominance of the powerless is not generally by coercion, but rather by leading and winning their consent. The left-wing version of the mass manipulative approach[162] describes much the same process as hegemony, in that those in power use the mass media to mystify and control the public. The right-wing version of mass manipulative theory sees the media as acting to lower cultural standards to propagate permissiveness.[163] In discussing the pros and cons of such a right-wing "mass culture," Real concludes that a steady mass culture diet eventually "creates public addiction to useless fare" and is an effective "weapon of cultural aggression and imperialism."[164]

This type of theoretical approach (both left- and right-wing versions) suggests that U.S. media owners have a vested interest in seeing the status quo continue, because they are part of the U.S. power structure,

defined by Dreier[165] as "the top positions in the institutional structure of the society." The members of this power structure, Dreier says, may exhibit differences of opinion on some topics, while still retaining an overall high degree of cohesiveness. Although the media will criticize the status quo to a certain extent, thus establishing their own legitimacy as news organizations, the media will never criticize the status quo enough to seriously threaten or change it.[166] The media do not mirror reality; they reflect "the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others."[167] This approach carries with it an assumption that audience members are relatively passive and isolated — dependent on the mass media for a sense of community.

Gitlin[168] describes hegemony as an extension of the social and institutional theoretical approach. Social forces (such as economic or cultural) may influence media content; a hegemonic explanation extends this line of thought to include reasons (generally ideological) for the economic or cultural forces acting as they do. While both theoretical approaches deal directly with the manipulation of power, hegemony attempts to explain why the power is so manipulated. Researchers who use the hegemony approach in their studies believe that ideology may be the way in which the various parts of society are integrated. In other words, hegemonic ideology influences the economic, cultural and technological forces which influence the media and their content.[169] The hegemonic (mass manipulative) and social/institutional influences approaches are so closely associated that it is difficult to say that some studies test hegemonic hypotheses while others test social/institutional influence hypotheses. We see the difference lying primarily in whether the independent variables are ideological or less abstract measures of economic and cultural factors, and there have been far more studies in the latter category than in the former.

Of the few studies we identified which actually test ideological hypotheses, two present evidence against the ideological approach, while one supports it. Becker[170] looked at whether a shift in the U.S. policy toward another country would be reflected in the *New York Times'* coverage of that country, finding that the newspaper did shift its coverage after the policy change, but the shift was away from the position taken by Washington. In a similar study, Liu[171] found no direct relationship between U.S. policy shifts toward mainland China and newspaper coverage of China. Chu and Chu[172] studied what may have been a bigger policy shift, and they did find a change in the quality and quantity of letters to the editor after the Cultural Revolution.

The tendency of the hegemonic model to ignore ideological variations among those who finance the media within a social system may explain why there is little empirical proof of ideological influences at work;[173] perhaps there are too many variables unaccounted for in the studies. The emphasis in these studies is on the ideology of the political system, disregarding the individual ideological influences of any and all financiers of the mass media. Broad-scale sociological theories like hegemony are inherently difficult to test on a social system level. Using the social system as the unit of analysis assumes less variance within a social system than between systems, an assumption which may not be valid.

Relationships Among the Five Approaches

We have reviewed well over 100 studies of influences on mass media content in an attempt to synthesize these works and to build a theory of influences on news content. The studies have been grouped into five general theoretical approaches: (a) Content reflects social reality with little or no distortion. (b) Content is a function of media routines. (c) Content is influenced by journalists' socialization and attitudes. (d) Content results from social and institutional forces acting on it. (e) Content is a function of ideological positions and a tool of the status quo.

These approaches are related to each other and to Altschull's economic theory of content.[174] The mirror approach stands alone, with its conceptualization of the mass media as impartial conveyors of social reality. A review of the literature shows that the media version of an event frequently does not coincide with information about the event from other sources. Explanations for the media's not mirroring reality can be found in journalistic routines, journalists' socialization, and influences from extra-media factors such as advertisers and audiences, and all of these factors are related to the ideologies of those who finance the news media.

These approaches may form a theoretical hierarchy, from the routines of newsgathering approach at the media task level of analysis, to the ideological approaches at the macro level: Why is the news gathered and transmitted in ways which may at times result in distortion? Because media employers and employees make decisions about how the job should be done. Why do they make such decisions? Because of economic, cultural, and technological imperatives. Why are these imperatives effective in controlling the media? Because the media are part of the status quo and have been influenced by the ideology of those in power to conform. Indicators of ideological influences at work may include cultural, economic, and technological factors. Indicators of these factors at work may include the personal and policy decisions made by individual journalists. Indicators of decisions made by journalists may include the habits and routines that journalists follow in doing their jobs.

The approaches may also be arrayed in terms of social significance of the predicted influences. The routines and journalist-centered approaches have relatively minor effects on the overall society. Most of the studies of the routines of newsgathering approach supported the notion that news is shaped by organizational habits. Yet the kinds of influence – use of press releases, accuracy of editing, choice of wire-service stories, story type, and editing – probably are not factors that would systematically emphasize or exclude certain content to serve institutional imperatives. The journalist-centered approach appears somewhat broader in the effects of its acceptance, dealing with choice about emphasis, inclusiveness, and ideology, but the potenial effects of journalists' actions are limited because they are value expressions by individuals rather than institutions at large. Although effects in these two theoretical approaches have some impact on individuals (for example, editing errors causing incorrect publication of a name or address), the overall result for society would not be great.

As indicators of the broad-scale approaches of social influence and ideological influences, however, the routines and journalist-centered approaches may signal more serious social impact. Support for an ideological influence approach like hegemony and for the social influence approach would indicate broad and pervasive effects on the relationship of media to society. For example, media content may be shaped by the "use" of a medium by a government or society, or social influences may affect the selection of programs for television or reduce diversity of media. Altschull's approach[175] deviates somewhat from this type of linear theoretical hierarchy, in that he assumes that ideology can be conceptualized on more than one level of analysis. The hegemony approach conceptualizes ideology as a social system variable, making tests of hegemonic-type hypotheses inherently difficult. In contrast, Altschull uses ideology as a criterion variable which may describe differences between social systems only if the differences between the systems are greater than differences within the systems — a classic analysis of variance approach. If the ideological influences within a nation (as one example of a social system) exerting hegemonic control are diverse and not homogeneous, then we would expect measurements of ideological influence using the nation as the unit of analysis to miss this intra-nation diversity and to contribute to null findings using such variables.

Therefore, to arrive at a more testable theory, we should shift the focus from the nation as the unit of ideological study to the ideology of those who finance the media — a variable which can be measured within and across nations. The following section will show how ideology-of-media-funder variables can be used on several levels of analysis.

BUILDING A THEORY OF INFLUENCES ON NEWS CONTENT

We have discussed how Altschull's[176] approach to the study of influences on media content can be used to integrate existing theoretical approaches and research findings. We believe that influences on media content can be predicted by knowledge of the ideologies of those who finance the media. In order to integrate other theoretical approaches and research findings with Altschull's theory, we have expanded Altschull's approach to explain influences on content at different levels of analysis, and we offer the following list of assumptions and theoretical statements for investigation. The terms "official," "commercial," "interest," and "informal" refer to Altschull's four types of relationships between funding sources and media content. See the introduction for complete definitions.

Assumptions

• *A country's mass media content is funded by a variety of people, groups, and institutions.* Altschull[177] says that even within the United States or the Soviet Union, there are examples of all four types of funding relationships. Therefore, using the nation as the level of analysis obscures important economic (and ideological) influences on media content. A hegemonic model, with its emphasis on the political ideology of nations, is inadequate to explain intra-nation content differences.

• *These people, groups, and institutions each hold a variety of ideological positions, although not all people, groups, and institutions hold ideological positions on all issues.* Media financiers do not hold uniform ideologies; each follows its own vested interests. In addition, there is no reason to expect that each financier holds an ideological position on every issue, since some issues will be of more importance to some financiers than to others. Some issues may even be irrelevant to some financiers.

• *These ideological positions vary among the people, groups, and institutions in the type of issues on which positions are held, as well as in the direction and strength of the positions.* Some financiers will be more interested in political issues, while others might be more interested in special interest topics. We also expect that ideological positions, like attitudes, can be expressed in a wide range of strengths and directions. All ideological positions are not of equal strength.

• *When a mass medium or an individual vehicle of a mass medium (such as a particular newspaper) is financed by a variety of people, groups, or institutions, then the various ideologies of these various financing sources will interact to influence media content.* Financial support from multiple sources will exert pressures from each of these sources on media content. This is similar to the power relationships described by Gans[178] among social and institutional variables. Each source follows its own vested interests, and each contributes to the overall content mix. This differs from the hegemony approach in that, while each financing source follows its own vested interests, this is not part of an overall ideological plot. While similar financing sources have related vested interests, this reflects the influence of a common set of economic imperatives rather than an effort to manipulate.

• *The resulting influence will affect all facets of the mass communication process, from the study of sources, audiences, advertisers, special interest groups, community and market variables, ownership patterns, and competition to journalists' socialization and the routines by which content is gathered, shaped, and transmitted.* The influence of financier ideology on content is not necessarily direct. It operates through the entire process of gathering, shaping and transmitting news, with differing patterns of competition, interaction with social and institutional sources, journalists' orientations, and newsgathering routines resulting from each unique mix of financing sources. This integrates all of the previous theoretical approaches, showing the relationships among the approaches. Social and institutional forces work on the mass media, causing owners and editors to hire and socialize journalists in certain ways, and making some newsgathering routines and habits more functional than others.

• *These ideological influences provide the best explanation of systematic variations in mass media content.* Individual differences among journalists or random error may influence media content in some instances, but the ideological influences on individuals' socialization and job routines should have more impact on content then most individual differences do. If systematic variation in media content is discovered across several vehicles of a medium or across several mass media, then ideological influences should explain this variation.

- *In the case of funding from mixed sources with equally strong and opposing ideological positions, content will reflect reality.* This is essentially a restatement of Young's[179] null effects model, with countervailing pressures from those who sell information to the media and those who buy media content resulting in media content which provides a fairly good picture of reality.
- *In the case of funding from mixed sources with unequally strong and opposing ideological positions, content will reflect the strongest ideological position, but its influence will be mediated by the other ideological positions.* The null effects model seems to assume equal and opposing forces, but several research studies (including the general social and institutional theoretical approach) previously discussed in this monograph show that opposing interests are sometimes not of equal strength. The result is that content reflects the ideological position of the strongest ideological position as mediated by the others. Each ideological position contributes to the content mix in proportion to its strength.

Theoretical Statements

The following statements represent testable refinements which follow logically from the previous list of assumptions. These are not intended to represent the universe of theoretical statements which could be tested; rather they elaborate the theory and provide ideas for future research.

Overall Influence of Funding Source on Content:

- *The more a media vehicle is financed by "official" sources, the more its content will reflect the ideologies of governmental bodies.* More institutional sources should be used and the fewer special interest groups will be cited. Content will be less controversial than in the commercial relationship. Fewer graphic devices will be used to entice the reader. Readability of content will be lower. Newsworthiness will be of minimal importance in evaluating content.
- *The more a media vehicle is financed by "commercial" sources, the more its content will reflect the ideologies of audiences and advertisers.* The relative influence of audiences and advertisers will be determined by the proportion of funding coming from these groups. The more support from advertisers, the more content will deal with product and service information. When most of the funding comes from advertisers, graphic devices will also be used extensively to attract readers/viewers, and content will be less complex, more readable. When most funding comes from the audiences, as in some literary magazines, there will in general be less emphasis on graphic devices and readability than when advertisers are the major funder. The nature of the target audience will have much influence, however, on the visual and verbal content, with content shaped to attract those in the target audience. Newsworthiness as a journalistic value will be more important in the commercial relationship than in any other. As media compete for audience members, they will emphasize timeliness more and more. Content will be either specialized

or general, depending on whether a specialized or mass audience is desired.

- *The more a media vehicle is financed by special "interest" groups, the more its content will reflect the ideologies of the groups.* Content will tend to be specialized, reflecting only those topics of direct interest to the group. Content will tend to be more controversial than in any other funding relationship. Newsworthiness will be less important as a news value.
- *The more a media vehicle is financed by "informal" sources, such as relatives or friends, the more its content will reflect these individuals' ideologies.* There will be less emphasis on newsworthiness as a news value in this type of relationship than in any other. Content will tend to emphasize more human interest and feature stories. There will be more opinion articles.

Influence of Funding Source on the Importance of System Variables:

- *The more a media vehicle depends on "official" funding sources*

. . . the less important competition is to content. Since competition for audiences has a limited effect on the existence of funding, we expect the presence or absence of competition to have very little impact on content variables such as diversity of content, use of graphic devices, or controversy.

. . . the less responsive the medium is to audience feedback. The audience does not provide financial support, so its vested interests are of minor concern. While letters columns may be included, these merely mimic the commercial media, with little or no attention paid to audience comments. Government-funded media will spend less money doing audience market research than will commercial media.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "commercial" sources*

. . . the more responsive it is to audience and advertisers. Commercial media rely on audiences either for direct funding or for ammunition to use in advertising sales. Substantially more market research will be done by these media than by any other type. Media vehicles will change their formats or content in response to audience or advertiser interests.

. . . the more competition will affect content. Where two media vehicles must compete for audience members content will be refined continually in order to meet what are perceived to be the audience's preferences. Content may be more diverse, it may include more controversial material, and it may be presented in a more attractive manner.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "interest" sources*

. . . the more important competing special interest groups are to content. In this type of relationship, competition comes not from within the same market, but rather from other groups with opposing or competing ideologies. Groups compete for membership and financial supporters. Their content will reflect their attempts to attract various target audiences. The more diverse the audience sought, the less ideologically strident the content will be.

. . . *the more responsive the media vehicle is to the funding group members and the less responsive it is to the general audience.* The audience of interest is generally not the mass audience, with its conflicting positions on the topic of interest (e.g., gun control), but rather those audience members who are predisposed to agreeing with the group. Alienating others through content may be a way of cementing the loyalty of group supporters.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "informal" sources*

. . . *the less important the presence or absence of competition is to content.* Like special interest groups, these informal financing sources use media content to get their messages out to the world. The messages may be of a broader ideological type than those of the special interest group, i.e., reflecting a particular philosophy instead of an issue position. Therefore, the presence or absence of competition within the market will be of minimal importance unless funding also comes from commercial sources.

. . . *the less responsive the medium is to audience feedback.* The funder's goal is to transmit his own philosophy about the world, not to reflect the audience's views. In addition, the funder is not required to please audiences in order to raise revenues.

Influence of Funding Source on Journalists' Roles:

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "official" sources*

. . . *the more likely the journalist is to hold values similar to those of the officials.* More radical journalists will probably not be attracted to government jobs. The authoritarian, hierarchical nature of such organizations probably also encourages conforming orientations.

. . . *the less likely the journalist is to see his job as that of an adversary to government.* The journalist's paycheck comes from the government, and he will see his job as transmitting the government's point of view in an accurate and complete way.

. . . *the less important the criterion "newsworthiness" is to story selection.* Much of the content will involve issue positions rather than being event-oriented. Issues are frequently less tied to timeliness or other news values.

. . . *the less important journalistic objectivity is.* The journalist will view himself as a conduit through which official points of view pass, and he is not compelled to seek out conflicting points of view in order to say he has done his job correctly.

. . . *the more the journalist will see his role as that of a public educator.* The journalist exists to facilitate communication from official sources to the public. If this communication is successful, then the public will have learned what the government wished it to.

. . . *the less important the journalist's personal attitudes are.* The journalist's personal attitudes are unimportant in comparison to the needs and policies of the government. He is not expected to insert his own opinions into media content.

. . . *the more likely the journalist is to see his role as a neutral transmitter of information.* The journalist is a conduit through which passes official pronouncements and important information. He does not

seek out information to be transmitted, but rather reacts to information that is presented to him.

- *The more a mass media is funded by "commercial" sources*

. . . the more important the newsworthiness is to story selection. Commercial media must compete for audiences with other vehicles within their own medium or with other media. One way to compete for audiences is through the continual emphasis on what is new and different.

. . . the more important journalistic objectivity is. Information is treated as a commodity which can be bought and sold; therefore attention to standards of objectivity make the content easier to market to other mass media. Journalists must also maintain some objective standards in order to protect them from criticism from all of the diverse vested interests among the audiences and advertisers who finance the media.

. . . the less likely the journalist is to see his role as a public educator and the more likely he is to see his role as giving the audience what it wants. This libertarian view is a reaction to the constraints of the market economy, where competing media adapt their content products in order to sell more content. There is considerable emphasis on market research as a guide to media content and format.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "interest" sources*

. . . the less important newsworthiness is to story selection. The most important criterion is getting out the information necessary for achieving the group's goals, regardless of the timeliness of that information.

. . . the less important journalistic objectivity is. Content is an important persuasive tool of the group's ideological goals and does not have to conform to the commercial media's convention of fairness.

. . . the more likely the journalist is to see his role as an educator. The goal of the publication is to educate and persuade. Journalists will be socialized to these goals.

. . . the more important the journalists' personal attitudes are to content. Journalists will probably agree with the group's goals and will be encouraged to use their writing skills to persuade.

. . . the more likely the journalist is to be a "participant." Journalists will use their investigative talents to further the group's goals.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "informal" sources*

. . . the less important journalistic objectivity is. Informal funders can follow their own ideological interests without feeling compelled to give equal play to competing ideologies.

. . . the more likely the journalist is to see his role as an educator. The journalist will be socialized to need to project the funder's philosophical views to the audience.

. . . the more important the journalists' personal attitudes are to content. Journalists may be attracted to these types of media because they share similar philosophies and attitudes, or journalists may be socialized to these philosophies and attitudes as they work.

. . . the more likely the journalist is to be a "participant." Owners will encourage either explicitly or implicitly the adoption of their own philosophies and the development of media content which will further the owners' goals.

Influence of Funding Source on Journalistic Routines:

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "official" sources*

. . . the less important deadlines are. Deadlines are primarily a function of the market economy, where advertisers purchase space/time based on a certain time schedule. Deadlines are far less important where funding comes from the government.

. . . the more government sources will be used. Not only will government sources be most accessible, but they will also provide the types of information and points of view most attractive to the official financiers.

. . . the less likely the content is to be event-oriented. Event-orientation is also primarily a function of the commercial funding relationship, with events being more exciting to the mass audience than issues. Government sources will primarily be concerned with the transmission of issue positions, so they will emphasize events less.

. . . the less likely the content is to be written in the inverted-pyramid style. Any style can be adopted, particularly those more useful in explaining issues. The inverted-pyramid is probably more useful in event-oriented stories.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "commercial" sources*

. . . the more important deadlines are. Advertisers depend on their ads being transmitted according to a fixed schedule, making content deadlines necessary.

. . . the more institutional (organized) sources will be used. These deadlines impose rigid schedules, making the easy access to sources important for the production of the news. Institutional sources, with their offices and regular hours, are easier to reach than individuals or poorly funded special interest groups.

. . . the more technology will be used in the production and transmission of content. Funds will be allocated wherever possible to improve the communication process in terms of quality, quantity, or speed. Also, the introduction of new media offer the potential for new profits.

. . . the more likely the content is to be event-oriented. In reaching large audiences to please advertisers, commercial media compete with each other for larger and larger audiences. Event-oriented stories tend to be more exciting than issue-oriented stories and are easier to schedule according to the fixed pace required by advertisers.

. . . the more likely the content is to be written in the inverted-pyramid style. Event stories lend themselves to this style of writing more than issue stories do. The fact that the story can be easily shortened by eliminating the last paragraphs makes this style more functional in a deadline-oriented business.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "interest" sources*

. . . the less important deadlines are. Special interest groups want to get their story out in a full and complete way. This makes deadlines less important than in the commercial media, where reaching the audience with advertising content is as or more important than getting the story out.

. . . the more noninstitutional sources will be used. Special interest groups are less well organized and have less money than most institutional sources, and so they are harder to reach in the deadline-oriented

commercial media. The interest media will make special efforts to get these sources into their stories, however, even it it means missing a deadline. The noninstitutional sources often have more important information for the interest media than the institutional sources.

. . . *the less likely the content is to be event-oriented.* The emphasis is on ideas and issues, which do not lend themselves to easy media events.

. . . *the less likely the content is to be written in the inverted-pyramid style.* Idea and issue stories often require a more complicated and lengthier format.

. . . *the more specialized the content.* The content is specialized according to the interests of the group. There is less emphasis on covering diverse content in order to attract a larger audience.

- *The more a media vehicle is funded by "informal" sources*

. . . *the less important deadlines are.* Deadlines are more important in the commercial media than in other types. In the informal media, the emphasis is on getting the funder's philosophy out to the audience, not on meeting arbitrary deadlines.

. . . *the less technology the medium will use to produce and transmit the content.* Without the importance of competition from other media for audiences and advertising revenues, the emphasis on technology is reduced.

. . . *the less likely the content is to be event-oriented.* The emphasis is on issues and ideas rather than on events.

CONCLUSIONS

We have built on the ideology-of-media-financiers idea introduced by Altschull.[180] Our theoretical approach elaborates on Altschull's work and integrates a number of other theoretical approaches into a more cohesive theory. A large number of hypotheses may be derived from this basic framework. It is important, however, to remember that the relationship between the funder's ideology and media content is issue-specific. If a financing source holds a political ideology, then we can hypothesize something about the political activities and attitudes of journalists and about the treatment of various political groups. For example, if the owners of a newspaper hold politically liberal views, then we might expect a liberal bias in the newspaper's content. This liberal bias would be mediated, however, by the political ideologies of other financial contributors to the medium, such as those of advertisers or audiences. If the funders of a media vehicle hold no political ideologies (or at least no strong ones), then we would expect coverage of politics in that medium to reflect "reality" within the constraints of technology and random variation.

We offer this theoretical approach as a way of integrating the diverse body of literature which deals with mass media content as a dependent variable. Although we believe that the mass media attempt to portray social reality in an accurate and representative manner, we also recognize that news content sometimes deviates from the view of social reality presented by other sources of information. Those deviations may be best explained and predicted by a economics-based model with the issue-specific ideology of those who finance the mass media interacting

to influence mass media content through relationships with social and institutional forces such as advertisers, audiences, and government; through ideological influences on the socialization and selection of journalists; and through the ways in which content is gathered, shaped, and transmitted. Because the ideological influences of those who fund a media vehicle interact with each other, no simple theoretical approach will suffice. To a certain extent, all of the theoretical approaches we have discussed in this paper are right: They each address a piece of the puzzle.

Our suggestion is to integrate these approaches into an economic model which explains media content as the product of a complex set of ideological forces held by those who fund the mass media. The audience is neither conceptualized as being totally passive or totally active, and to some extent the concept of audience activity is irrelevant. Audience exert influence, according to our theory, only to the extent that they are part of the financial basis of the media vehicle, such as when audiences provide revenues directly or when audiences are necessary in order to get advertising revenue. Our theoretical approach makes no direct assumptions about the effects of media content on the audience, although it is not hard to conjecture about effects. It seems clear that the nature and strength of effects of content will depend not only on content variables, but on a host of situational and audience variables as well. We are drawn to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach's[181] theory of audience dependency. When individual audience members are isolated, part of the mass society, they must depend on the mass media for their understanding of the larger world. In such a situation, the ideological positions of those who fund the mass media will influence the audience's picture of the world to an important extent and will have important consequences for audiences' attitudes and behaviors. In such a mass society, those who fund the mass media will directly influence both individuals' actions and the direction and extent of social change.

Hegemony and the mass manipulative model predict similar effects in that they see the audience as passively accepting the view of the world promoted by the powerful. Unlike the hegemony or mass manipulative models, however, our theory does not explain these effects as the result of the powerful intentionally affecting the common sense of the powerless, but rather as the result of each media financier following its own vested ideological interests. In the commercial media, audiences want to be entertained or informed (to name only two of the gratifications sought by audiences), and their feedback to the media which they support with subscription fees has a large influence on media content. Where advertisers contribute the bulk of the funds, advertisers' vested interest in selling products or services and making profits leads them to emphasize building audiences and to pay attention to the gratifications audiences seek. Official media seek to promote official, governmental messages by whatever means are possible. While the format of official media may mimic commerical media for the purpose of conveying an implicit sense of audience responsiveness, the official media's verbal content will reflect only the ideology of official sources. The interest media and the informal media both also follow their own desires to communicate their views.

While it is possible that the effects predicted by our theory and by the

hegemony or mass manipulative models can be similar, this is in fact unlikely in a country where the mass media are themselves diverse and are funded by a variety of sources. Our theory does not predict a nationwide hegemonic ideological influence on media content in most instances, but instead predicts that a multitude of conflicting vested interests will interact to produce content unique to each country in some ways, but similar across countries in many others.

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